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## Award-winning teacher is mentor

Nathan Furney helps students learn industrial skills

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Ben Davis Career Center's Nathan Furney prides himself on being a firm yet relatable teacher.

"I try to be as laid-back as possible, but I also need to establish authority as well," he said. "A lot of my students come from single-parent homes and are not used to a lot of discipline. Some have problems with authority, and I've got to step up and say, 'Hey, you've gotta get this job done. You're here to work.' "

Furney, an industrial technology teacher, recently was honored as one of 25 Central Indiana teachers to receive the 2008 Indianapolis Power & Light Co.'s Golden Apple Award. He was selected for his innovative uses of math, science and technology.

Furney, 30, teaches metals manufacturing, communications systems and plastics technology. While he instructs students on how to use dangerous equipment safely, he also teaches them how metals fuse together and how to work with gases. The students learn how to take precise, accurate measurements and to cut carefully.

"When you machine parts, if you're not precise, they're not going to fit," said Furney, who is in his fourth year at the Career Center.

For many students, the math portion of the class is a particular challenge. Furney said it takes a lot of patience to teach students to use math skills.

"They learn math on paper, but they've not applied it," he said. "This is the first time they've actually had to apply anything."

During Tuesday's metals manufacturing class, Furney assisted students as they constructed wind-powered vehicles. The vehicles have large fan blades on the back, which will connect to the axles and power the car when placed in front of a fan. The car with the fastest speed and distance will win.

"We have total creativity. There's no bounds on what we want to do," said senior Jordan Bullen, 18, taking a break from working on his car. "It's a great break from book work."

Bullen said the project has taught him about teamwork, while Furney has shown him how to use new equipment.

"He's a great guy. I've had him before this class and he's real patient and helpful," he said.

Furney said he has a wide variety of students in his classes and enjoys interacting with different groups.

"Some are really good students with 3.8 GPAs and some others really struggle," said Furney, who lives in Broad Ripple.

Furney has a bachelor's degree in industrial technology from Indiana State University and is working on a master's in education from Indiana Wesleyan.

He said he was honored to be singled out for the Golden Apple award, which came with a \$2,000 prize. In addition, IPL donated \$1,000 to his school.

Prizes aside, he said ultimately, he wants to make a difference in his students' lives.

"All it takes is one kid to say, 'Thanks, hey I've enjoyed your class,' " he said. "If I have 30 kids in each class and three say thanks, it's all worthwhile."

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